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ABSTRACT

This study examined how the experiences of African-American and white students in a partial French immersion second grade classroom in Louisiana differed from the experiences of students in a regular education classroom. It focused on students' perceptions of themselves and others, students' interactions with their teacher and peers, parental support of students' educational experiences, and teacher interactions with students. Using field observations, interviews, and questionnaires, this cross-comparative case study found that while overall students' self-concept was better in regular education, African-American girls benefited immensely in terms of self-concept, their peers' perception of them, and the extended interactions they had with the teacher. Further, African-American students in the regular education classroom, while having high self-concept, were perceived negatively or not at all by their peers, often had negative interactions with the teachers, and were not included in extended interactions with the teacher. French immersion was a more social environment where students helped each other and in which girls, particularly African-American girls, were perceived in a positive light. Students' scores are appended. (Contains 12 references.) (SM)

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PERCEPTIONS, INTERACTIONS AND IMMERSION: A CROSS-COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES IN A FRENCH IMMERSION CONTEXT AND A REGULAR EDUCATION CONTEXT

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Louisiana State UniversityStudies in the French immersion context have found that African-American students reap additional academic benefits in that context (Holobow, Genesee & Lambert, 1987; Caldas & Boudreaux, 1999), but few studies have been done to explain why immersion would be more beneficial to these students. Ogbu (1999) shows the connection between African-American parent and student dialect beliefs, attitudes and school behavior in regular education. While other research indicates that students' self-concept improves in a second language-learning environment (Masciantonio, 1977; Wright & Taylor, 1995). This study examines African-American students' experiences in a partial French immersion setting and in a regular education setting focusing on the perceptions and interactions of African-American students, their teachers and their peers and includes parental support.

Using field observations, interviews and questionnaires, this cross-comparative case study found that while overall students' self-concept was better in regular education, African-American girls benefited immensely in term of self-concept, their peers' perception of them and the extended interactions they had with the teacher. Further, African-American students in the regular education classroom while having a high self-concept were perceived negatively or not at all by their peers, often had negative interactions with the teacher and were not included in extended interactions with the teacher.

INTRODUCTION

Studies in the French immersion context have found that African-American students reap additional academic benefits in that context (Holobow, Genesee & Lambert, 1987; Caldas & Boudreaux, 1999), but few studies have been done to explain

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why immersion would be more beneficial to these students. Masciantonio (1977) found that students' self-concept improves in a second language-learning environment. Wright & Taylor (1995) discovered that a child's self-esteem and collective self-esteem improves more when studying a heritage language, than a second-language and much more than when studying an assimilating language. Aguirre (1999) likewise found that students are more motivated to study a language that they do not perceive as threatening their own language and culture. Ogbu (1999) illustrates how Standard English or school English is seen as assimilationist in one African-American community and the connection between African-American dialect beliefs, attitudes and school behavior in regular education.

French immersion is considered a heritage language program in Louisiana and it allows students to succeed academically without passing through the filter of Standard English, which African-American parents and students in Ogbu's study considered "talking white." This study focuses on the question *How do the experiences of students in a partial French immersion classroom differ from the experiences of students in a regular education classroom?*

In addition to the comparison of the two classroom contexts, there is also an interest and examination of how African-American students are perceived, how they interact, and parental support within each class. In order to answer the research question, this study examines African-American students' school experiences focusing on 1) students' perceptions of themselves and others; 2) student interactions with their teacher and their peers; 3) parental support of students' educational experiences and 4) teacher interactions with the students.

Participants

The participants in this study were drawn from two intact second grade classrooms in an integrated public school in southwestern Louisiana. The school is a Title I school with nearly 70% of its students on free or reduced lunch and with over half the student population comprised of minority students. This school was selected because it is one of the few immersion schools in Louisiana with a balanced ratio of African-American and white students. The parish (district) in which the school is situated is

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considered the heart of Cajun and Creole country because a large percentage of residents are of francophone heritage.

Two classes were selected for the study, one French immersion class, in which subject content is taught in French, and one regular education class, in which all subjects are taught in English. The classes were selected by matching the immersion and regular education teachers' scores on the Primary Teacher Questionnaire (Smith, 1993). The Primary Teacher Questionnaire (Smith, 1993) is a self-reported teacher belief scale that contains items from both a developmentally appropriate subscale and a traditionally based subscale. The Primary Teacher Questionnaire's (PTQ) subscale were internally consistent with high reliability estimates (DAP=.802; TRAD = .867). In addition factorial analysis of the two factors demonstrated item clusters that were "highly consistent with the logical structures of the guidelines on which the PTQ was based." (Smith, 1993 p. 23).

The two teachers selected did not match perfectly on the PTQ but they were the closest possible match. The French immersion teacher, Mme. Voisin, was found to have a more developmental approach to teaching while the regular education teacher, Mrs. Thibodeaux, had a more traditional approach. Direct observation corroborated the PTQ. Mme. Voisin's class consisted of mostly learning centers, circle time and hands-on activities while Mrs. Thibodeaux had a more teacher-centered, paper and pencil and independent activities.

Within each classroom four students, two African-American students, a girl and a boy, and two white students, a girl and a boy, were selected to be interviewed based on matched reading-levels and academic grades.

METHODOLOGY

This case study consisted of five-weeks of direct observations recorded in fieldnotes in each class two to three times each week for 30 to 60 minutes a session. During the five weeks of field observations students were interviewed for about 20 minutes each using a researcher-revised version of Wright & Taylor's (1995) Self and Collective Esteem Scale. The Wright and Taylor scale revealed the students perceptions of themselves and their classmates within the two contexts. The participants chose certain classmates and sometimes themselves as having some positive traits (happy,

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nice, smart, many friends, good at many things and like school) and some negative traits (other students don't like, not good at school). Teachers were also interviewed, once formally for about 10 minutes and then at various times informally. Because the formal interviews were done during the teachers' lunch break it was not feasible to tape record the interviews because the background noise of the cafeteria would have been too loud but notes were taken during the interviews. Additionally, a researcher created parent survey was sent home

Once the field observations were completed the researcher distributed a self-concept inventory to all of the participating students (Wiseman & Adams, 1972). In addition to measuring the participants' self-concept the picture inventory also measures the students' attitude toward school and peers. The "Self-concept Picture Inventory" (Wiseman, D & Adams, J, 1972) consists of 48 sub-titled pictures of stick figures involved in a school activity. The participant is given four pictures and asked to choose the one which best reflects him or herself.

Data collected for the study was compiled into a database and emerging themes were drawn from the database using the constant comparative method of data analyses (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Individual case study reports were given to the participant teachers as a member check and then a cross comparative case study report was created.

FINDINGS

While the overarching research question for this study was: *How do the experiences of students in a partial French immersion classroom differ from the experiences of students in a regular education classroom?* the data collection and analyses focused on the 1) students' perceptions of themselves and others; 2) student interactions with their teacher and their peers; 3) parental support of students' educational experiences and 4) teachers' individualized interactions with students. The findings will be reported according to these subcategories. In addition to these subcategories, the question, *Is this differential effect enhanced if the students are African-Americans?*, will be discussed as well in each category

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Do the four French immersion students perceive themselves more positively than the four regular education students perceive themselves? Is this differential effect enhanced if the students are African-Americans?

According to the "Self-concept Picture Inventory" (Wiseman,D. & Adams, J, 1972), and in terms of the entire classes, French immersion students do not perceive themselves more positively than regular education students. The "Self-concept Picture Inventory" had a score ranging from 12 to 48 with the lower score signifying a more positive self-concept. The students' scores can be examined in the Appendix. Overall, the average score on the inventory were comparable for both contexts, with the French immersion students averaging a score of 18.53 (sd 5.63) while the regular education students averaged a score of 18.31 (sd 6.84). When broken down by gender and ethnicity the self-concept scores were more positive (lower) for students in the regular education in three of the four grouping. However, there were outlier French immersion students that raised the average in these three grouping. Similarly, in the one grouping wherein French immersion students' average indicated a more positive self-concept, there was an outlier regular education African-American boy who raised the average. In other words, differences across programs appeared to be due to particular students whose extreme scores affected the averages.

In terms of the participants' self-concept scores it is important to note that the white French immersion participants both had outlier scores for their groups. Kristi, had a score of 23, which indicates a negative self-concept and Trey had an even lower score of 32, which indicates an even more negative self-concept. The African-American participants in French immersion had much more positive scores than their white counterparts. The African-American boy, Jeremy, had the most positive of all scores a 12, while the African-American girl, Maya, had a score of 16 (another positive score). Of the four participants in the regular education class the highest score was a 21 for Kevin the white boy. This score still indicates a positive self-concept according to the inventory. As for the other regular education participants they all had positive self-concept scores: Valery, the white girl, had a score of 16; Helen, the African-American girl, had a score of 17; and Casey, the African-American boy, had a score of 17. Please see Appendix A.

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However, after having given the inventory, I realized that it was more a test of correct behavior and socialization rather than self-concept. According to Campbell-Whatley and Corner, "self-concept includes, self-image, self-esteem and attitudes toward self (Crocker, Luhtanen, Blaine & Broadnax, 1994; Hartner, 1993; Obiakor, Algozzine & Campbell-Whatley, 1997; Verkuyten, 1995). It is shaped and molded by a person's unique experience in an interactive system that includes the family and its primary social network of friends and kin and meaningful organizations...(p.19)." Given this definition with its emphasis on the importance of the students' social networks of friends, it is difficult to understand why Wiseman and Adams would give a more positive self-concept score to a child reading a book all alone rather than two friends with their arms around each others shoulders. Likewise, they give a more positive score to the child who plays so much on the playground that he ignores the other students while the child who is playing ball with the other students gets a lower score in self-concept. With regard to the boy's scores there were a few items that also tripped them up for example jump roping with friends elicited the response, "That's for girls!" from one of the students. While the children playing ball together received a lower score on self-concept than the jump ropers. Likewise simply holding hands with a friend rather than playing ball on the playground conferred a higher self-concept score.

Given these weaknesses in the Wiseman and Adams inventory, I decided to use a second measure which was based on Wright and Taylor's (1995) test of personal and collective self-esteem. However, this measure was not without its problems. Wright and Taylor (1995) base their measure on Clark and Clark 's (1939 cited in Wright & Taylor, 1995) doll studies in which participants chose which doll, the black or the white one, had which attribute. Wright and Taylor used photographs. Hatcher and Troyna (1993) critique this methodological and interpretive paradigm in which children "are made to notice the outer difference and to accept them as signs of an inner differences of value (Laker, 1929 cited in Hatcher & Troyna, 1993,p. 110)." They state that in using such methods " researchers collude wittingly or otherwise in legitimizing "race" as a valid criterion for differentiating the population (p. 111)." To avoid "legitimizing 'race' as a valid criterion", the participants classified their classmates, not photographs or dolls, according to the same characteristics as in the Wright and Taylor study (Happy, smart, lots of friends, everybody likes, etc). Additionally, instead of asking students about "race" the children

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were asked to establish another classification for themselves and a group of their friends. This section will look at how the students classified themselves.

When the French immersion participants were asked if they would put themselves in the happy group the French immersion boys, white and African-American, both put themselves in the happy group. The French immersion girls, white and African-American, both said "sometimes". The white girl in French immersion also added that a lot of the students are "mean to me". This seemed to indicate that perhaps she wasn't as happy as the other participants. Gender, as will be shown, seemed to play a much larger role than race in the French immersion classroom. The regular education participants all said they would go in the happy group. When asked if they would go in the nice group, all eight of the participants said "yes".

When the participants were asked if they would put themselves in the "smart" group all but one of the French immersion participants said they would go in this group. The one participant, Jeremy, the African-American boy said "no" he would not go in this group. It must be remembered that Jeremy is a "B" student who at the beginning of second grade is able to read at the 2.3 (grade 2 month 3) level. In the regular education class all but one participant said they would go in the smart group. The one participant, as in the French immersion class, was the African-American boy, Casey. Casey also is a "B" student who at the beginning of second grade is able to read at the 2.2 level. Both African-American boys, followed similar patterns in their peer classifications, which will be discussed in the next section.

When participants were asked if they were "good at many things", the African-American French immersion participants both said "yes" while the white French immersion participants said "no". All of the regular education participants said that they were good at many things.

Both groups of participants, French immersion and regular education, also said that they had many friends. However, when the students were asked if they would go in the group with children "who the other children don't like", both boys in the French immersion participants group said that they would go in the group while both of the African-American participants in the regular education class said that they were students

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"who the other children don't like." This again follows a pattern that was also seen in the peer classification.

When students were asked who did not do well in school, the white French immersion participants were the only students to classify themselves as not doing well in school. This was after both of these students had put themselves in the "smart" group. For Kristi, the white French immersion girl, this finding was not surprising since she has the lowest reading level of the class, 1.6, and during class observations she was often helped by students around her. In terms of Trey, it is shocking! Trey read at the 3.3 grade level; this is well above the expected grade level. In addition, Trey made straight "A's" in first grade. However, the peers that Trey chose for this group may have contributed to him not choosing himself for this attribute.

Overall the regular education students in both the Wiseman and Adams inventory and the subsequent adapted Wright and Taylor self-esteem test appeared to have more positive outlooks regardless of ethnicity or gender. In the French immersion group the African-American girls appeared to have both better self-concept scores and better self-esteem. In retrospect, given that both of the white French immersion participants had much more negative self-concept scores, it would have been better to have selected other students. However, based on the criteria available to choose the students, I still feel that the matches made were the closest matches possible.

Do the four French immersion students perceive their peers differently than the four regular education students perceive their peers? Is this differential effect enhanced if the students are African-Americans?

The Wright and Taylor (1995) inspired self-esteem test furthermore allowed the participants to classify their peers, their classmates according to these same categories, of happy, nice, smart, good at many things, and not doing well at school. When looking at the participants' choices in terms of gender and the ethnicity, some definite patterns emerged. Additionally, the new category which the participants were allowed to construct and into which they classified classmates gave further insight into the participants' perception of their peers.

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When asked which of their classmates were happy the French immersion participants tended to name girls in the class, especially African-American girls. Not including the participants classification of themselves, they made 9 choices altogether of students who they saw as being happy. Of these 9 choices 6 were girls and 4 of those girls were African-American. The only discernible pattern as to who made what choice was that Kristi, the white girl, chose only white students as being happy. This pattern of white choosing white students or not choosing African-American students was even more apparent in the regular education class. While Kristi only named two students, both of whom were white, Kevin, the white regular education boy, named 5 students none of whom were African-American, but two of whom were Asian-American. Likewise, Valery, who named 4 students, had no African-American students in her happy category. The both African-American the boy's and the African-American girl's participants list of happy students were much more diverse each list having boys, girls, African-Americans, Asian-Americans and white students.

When the students classified which of their classmates they considered nice the French immersion students split nearly perfectly along gender lines. The girls had 10 of their 11 choices as other girls, while the boys had 5 of their 6 choices as other boys. The only participant who did not have diversity in their choices in terms of ethnicity was Jeremy who did not choose an African-American student as nice. However, since he seemed limited by gender in his choice and since there were only two African- American boys, of which he was one, this does not seem to extraordinary finding. The regular education class had very diverse groups, except for two exceptions. Kevin, the white boy, did not choose either of the two African-American girls as nice. This was not due to a gender bias. Kevin did have an Asian-American girl and three white girls in his nice group. Valery, the white girl, did show some gender bias. She had a very diverse list of girls only.

When classifying who they thought were the "smart students" the French Immersion participants, boys and girls alike, chose girls. Out of 14 choices 13 of these choices were girls. This was due in part to the fact that the two strongest students in the class, Nathalie and Kelly, were chosen by every French Immersion participant. So out of the 14 choices 8 of them were for Nathalie, an African-American girl and Kelly, a white

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girl. However, even out of the remaining 6 choices 5 were still girls. Of these five female choices, 4 were African-American and one was white. Again we see the positive leanings in the French immersion class toward the girls, especially the African-American girls.

The regular education participants did not have such pronounced patterns. Helen, the African-American girl, again chose a very diverse group including all genders and ethnicities as "smart". The boys showed gender bias and chose only other boys as being "smart". Casey, the African-American boy, chose Eric, the Asian American boy and no one else, while Kevin chose Eric and Blane, an African-American boy. Valery, like Helen, had a very diverse choice of students, but she had more girls than boys and, as in the previous categories, she does not include any African-American boys.

On the same vein, the students classified their peers according to whom was "good at many things". In the French immersion class, as in the "smart" category, Nathalie and Kelly were nearly the only choices, seven out of the eight choices were for them. Jeremy was the only French immersion participant who did not pick Nathalie. He chose John, the Creole (African-American) boy instead. Thanks to Nathalie and Kelly the choices were once again overwhelmingly female.

In the regular education class, Helen again showed amazing diversity in her choices for "good at many things" with both genders and all ethnicities represented. The only pattern apparent for the two boys was that neither Casey nor Kevin chose either of the African-American girls. Valery finally did choose an African-American boy as having a positive attribute, but she did so using a caveat. She chose Alex saying that he was "starting to do good things". There seemed to be a more negative conception of the African-Americans in this class especially with regards to the two African-American girls.

The final positive attribute categories under which the participants classified their peers was "those who have many friends", in other words the popular students. It is here where one enters into the social politics of the classroom. As I was interviewing the French immersion participants I initially believed that no pattern was emerging and then I interviewed Kristi. Kristi named a white boy, a white girl, herself and then she said "nobody" hesitated an instance and corrected herself. "Oh and Maya and Tonya cuz they got a group of girls". When I reexamined the names given by the French immersion

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student I found that the only student who hadn't mentioned Tonya, a loquacious African-American girl, as being popular was another member of her group Maya. In field observations I had noticed that Tonya, Maya, Gisele and Theresa were often talking, helping each other or making face/gestures at each other. This group that both Maya and Tonya were part of might have contributed to the positive leaning that the class had in terms of African-American girls.

In stark contrast to the immersion classroom, none of the participants in the regular education classroom listed either of the two African-American girls as a child who has many friends. Helen, the African-American girl named seven people, nearly all of them were white: five white students, three girls and two boys; the white teacher and the one exception, an African-American boy named Jesse. Casey, the African-American boy also perceived white students as the popular students. Out of the five students that he listed three of the students were white, one of the students, Eric, was listed as Asian on his cumulative folders but both the researcher and the teacher first believed he was white. The other child was Blaine, an African-American boy. Kevin had a diverse group of mostly girls, four white girls and Liz the Asian-American girl, and only two boys, Blaine and Eric. Valery had the most balanced diversity, except for the absence of African-American girls. She included the two Asian-Americans, Eric and Linda; two African-American boys, Alex and Jesse; one white boy, Kevin and two white girls, the twins Bianca and Brenda.

Once the participants had responded to all those positive attributes they were asked two questions about peers who had some negative attributes. The first question was, " who in the class was not well liked? In the French immersion class both boys named just themselves and Kelly, the very high-achieving white girl. Maya named Jeremy "because of his finger." Kristi had quite a long list naming Ethan, a white boy, Tonya, an African-American girl who in the previous question she had listed as having many friends, Tracy, an African-American girl, and Kelly. No clear pattern was discernible in these responses except that Kelly was not well liked and that both boys, as previously mentioned considered themselves as not well liked while the girls did not.

The regular education class did have a pattern of perceiving boys and minorities as not well liked. Helen named Eric, Alex, Jesse and Kent as not being well liked. Eric,

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Alex and Jesse are all minority students and Kent is a low achieving white student who is of very small stature and wears thick glasses. Helen said that Alex, Jesse and Kent all tease her. Casey also talked more of who teased him. He listed three boys that he did not like, Kevin, Jesse and Alex. Kevin said that none of the students were not liked, while Valery listed Liz, the Asian-American student and Iris the other African-American student besides Helen.

The other negative attribute was the classification of students who were "not good at schoolwork." In the French immersion classroom these students were overwhelmingly male. Jeremy listed Marcia, a white girl who had just been taken out of the program and Tom an average achieving white boy. Beside himself, Trey listed Jason, Tom, Quincy, Ethan (all average achieving white boys) and John (an average to high achieving creole/ African-American boy). Maya named Trey as a classmate who was not good at schoolwork, because "he always have to go meet the teacher." Kristi first named herself and then John. She also said "maybe Theresa". Theresa was the only African-American girl named and even she was a maybe. Kristi was the only white girl in the class mentioned and she mentioned herself. Compare this overwhelmingly male, negative attribute to the overwhelmingly female, positive attribute of "smart."

In the regular education class the boys' choices were along gender and ethnicity lines. Casey chose two other African-American boys, Alex and Jessie, while Kevin listed two white boys, Charles and Kent. Additionally, Kevin listed one white girl, Katie. The data on the regular education girls is incomplete.

After the more directed questions participants were given the freedom to create their own group and decide who would go in the group. The French immersion participants groups were Jeremy's "Plays hide and seek everyday" group; Trey's "Boy's group"; Maya's "Friends" group; and Kristi's "Aggravating" group. All of the students except Kristi included themselves in their group. Jeremy had a very diverse group that included both genders and ethnicities and even included his younger sister. Trey's group, true to its title, included all boys and except for the very light-skinned John, it included only white boys. Maya's group included both white and African-American, but it was an all girl group. Kristi's group included every group except the white girls, who apparently do not aggravate her. For the white students, both gender and ethnicity

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appear to be important to the inclusion/ exclusion of group members. While, Maya, the African-American girl, is concerned only with gender. Jeremy's criteria for group inclusion was based on a behavior namely participation in a game rather than on a personal attribute.

The regular education self-made groups cut strictly down gender lines. The groups were, "we play together on the monkey bars," "Games, t.v. and food," "last year 1st grade," and "smart group." Helen's group like Jeremy's was based on a behavior, "we play together on the monkey bars." Her group contained eight people, besides herself, only two of whom are boys and three of whom are not in her class. Both Helen and Valery listed mostly girls in their self-made groups. Valery's "smart group" contained five diverse girls, Bianca, Liz, Lacey, Iris, Helen and only two boys Eric and Kevin. Valery's group was also majority white, but it did have diversity with both of the African-American girls and both Asian-American students. Once again, though, Valery excluded African-American boys. Casey's group, "Games, t.v. and food," had mostly boys, four boys of diverse ethnicity and one white girl, Bianca. Kevin's group included both boys and girls, but since it was from his previous year in school, their ethnicities were not available. Kevin did mention Casey in his "last year 1st grade" group.

On a final note the students made some comments on how they would want to change in their class. The patterns that emerged here were across class patterns rather than patterns within each class. The most serious wishes came from both the African-American girls. Both girls wanted peace in their classroom. Maya in the French immersion class said, "I wish we could all be friends. Kristi and Tammy don't get along with Ethan. Kristi's mom said she can't get by Ethan because he chased her and he teased her and he's a bad boy." Likewise, the theme of bad boys was reflected in Helen's wish. When asked what she would change in her class she responded, "Some of them are mean, Alex and Jessi; that's the two bad boys." I then asked her what she would do. " Tell. I'd rather them go in another class or Ms. B's (vice-principal) office." Furthermore, Jeremy had a wish that dealt with peace in the classroom he declared, "Don't let 'em hit me." When I asked who, he said the girls, but then he went on to say that the girls don't hit hard, but the boys do. Then he continued, "Boys' don't hit girls, they hit boys unless they have to." In each of these aspirations for peace in the classroom the disruptions are

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along gender lines. The other students' wishes were a bit off the wall. Casey wanted ten hours of homework each night. Kevin wanted to change the school into a big Astroworld and have the cafeteria serve pizza everyday. Trey wanted to switch from French to Chinese immersion. Both of the white girls wishes had to do with changing the actual physical classroom. Kristi wanted to have the class outside, while Valery wanted more holiday decorations and designs that could hang from the roof.

The final student interview question that offered surprising insight into the students' perception of their peers, a least in the regular education class was the question concerning the teacher's treatment of students. Neither of the African-American students perceived their teacher as treating other students differently, but both of the regular education white students did notice a difference in treatment. When asked, "Does your teacher treat everyone the same way?" Kevin responded, "No, sometimes she screams at people like Jesse and Charles and Alex.". As a follow-up question as to why he answered, "Because they bad." Valery answered the same question, "Jesse is the only different. He's bad. She treats the good one's kinda normal." The French Immersion students did not perceive any of their peers as being treated differently by the teacher.

In summary, the French immersion students consider female peers as possessing positive attributes while male peers possess the negative ones. The importance of gender is evident in the happy and nice question. In addition, the importance of the African-American girls in influencing the class is apparent in peer perception. Gender bias was evident in all the students. Overall, in both classes, white students were more likely to exclud other ethnicity. Mrs. Thibodeaux, the regular education teacher, unwittingly propagated the white students' negative perceptions of the African-American students. Regular education white students noticed that some of the African-American boys were treated differently than the others. When asked why they said that these students were bad. The regular education white girl, Valery, had a very pronounced exclusion of African-American male students. Contrarily, the regular education African-American students, especially Helen, demonstrated diversity of choice. Besides diversity of choice, three of the four African-American students, when asked

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what they would change about the class, spoke of a peaceful class with no arguments or hitting.

Do the French immersion students initiate a greater number of interactions with their teachers and peers than the regular education students?

The answer to this question was an unabashed yes. The reason the French immersion students initiated so many more interactions with both their peers and the teacher had mainly to do with the management of the class. It is here that the differences that were seen in the initial selection of the teachers were made apparent. In the French immersion classroom, Mme Voisin, who has a more developmental approach to teaching, used cooperative learning centers for nearly every observation. In the regular education classroom, Mrs Thibodeaux, who has a more traditional approach to teaching, used a teacher-centered class structure.

In the teacher-centered, regular education class, the students had short messages that were usually addressed to the teacher. In the student-centered, French immersion class, the students had social messages, task-oriented messages and managerial messages that were more often directed at their peers. In French immersion, the social interaction followed strict gender lines. Since the students were in teacher-selected cooperative groups, the task-oriented and managerial messages were based on proximity, who was in the area of the learning center. Moreover, in the French immersion classroom where the students were responsible for completing the learning task, the length and complexity of their messages was greater.

The students' responsibility for achieving tasks also appeared to affect the amount of teacher remediation in the classroom. In both classrooms, the amount of teacher remediation was inversely related to amount of students helping students. In French immersion there were 18 instances where the teacher remediated the French immersion students, but there were 20 instances in which the students helped other students. In the regular education classroom, the teacher remediated her students 37 times while students helped other students only four times.

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Is this differential effect enhanced if the students are African-Americans?

The only differential in terms of ethnicity and student-initiated interactions was found in the French immersion classroom. In French immersion, social interaction centered around girls especially the "girl group" of high-achieving African-American students. In addition, although the majority of student helping student instances were usually based on proximity in teacher assigned groups, the two exceptions to this apparent rule of proximity occurred with African-American students crossing the classroom to help other African-American students. These two exceptions followed gender lines.

How does the parental support of students' educational experiences in partial French immersion differ from the parental support of students' educational experiences in regular education?

There was not much difference seen in the parental support of the students' educational experiences. In French immersion 100% of the parents participate in conferences and ensured that the students had done their homework, but the regular education classroom was not far behind. While the teachers did not report a difference in volunteering overall the French immersion parents reported volunteering more. In addition, French immersion parents reported spending more time on homework. A couple of parents stated that homework was a hardship (over 2 hrs/night according to one parent).

Is this differential effect enhanced if the students are African-Americans?

In French immersion there was no apparent differences between the parental support offered by parents of white or African-American students. In regular education, some of the African-American parents qualified their responses when speaking of home/school communication and they seemed to be referring to something, however, due to the time constraints of this study no interview was possible.

How does the teacher's individualized interaction with the students in partial French immersion differ from the teacher's individualized interaction with the students in regular

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education?

Mrs. Thibodeaux, the regular education teacher used a lot of positive feedback (34) and some negative feedback (18) when addressing the students. Mme Voisin rarely used positive or negative feedback (4 total). During the analysis of the study, the French immersion coordinator commented on this finding saying that many of the French immersion teachers are penalized during observations because they do not use much positive feedback, but the coordinator stated that this was because they felt that learning was intrinsically motivating (Boudreaux, 2001).

Although the French Immersion teacher did not offer much feedback for her students, she did offer many more extensions (24 vs. 11) for her students. Extensions were defined as questions or statements that pushed students to find own answers or go further in thinking. In both classes, the extensions were often directed at the stronger students. In the regular education class, nine of the 11 extensions were directed toward the white female participant, Valery and the two Asian-American students, Eric and Liz, all very high achieving students. In French immersion, extensions were offered to more of the students but even so Tonya, a very high-achieving African-American girl and Trey, the very high achieving French immersion white male participant, received nine of the 24 extensions.

Apart from the feedback and the extensions there was another interaction that occurred in the regular education class that never occurred during observations of the French immersion classroom. That was the use of choruses. The regular education teacher often used these choruses to remind students of rules while they were doing whole group activities and or individual work. The choruses such as "e makes the ___say its own name" or "whole minus part equals part" were used to reinforce classroom learning. However, based on the amount of remediation that was needed after the regular education teacher and students would use the chorus, the choruses did not seem to have the effect they were intended to have.

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Is this differential effect enhanced if the students are African-Americans?

There were quite a few differences in the teacher interactions with African-American students especially with regard to the regular education teacher. In the regular education classroom, one-half of the negative feedback was directed toward one African-American girl, Iris. Of the 9 remaining negative remarks 4 were directed at another African-American boy, Alex. Interestingly, while the class perceived the regular education teacher's differential treatment of Alex, they did not perceive that treatment with regards to Iris. This again underlines the theme of invisibility that was found in the participants' perception of their peers with regards to African-American girls in the regular education classroom.

While African-American students received more negative feedback, only one African-American student answered an extension question. Furthermore, Eric, a high achieving Asian boy and Valery, the high achieving white girl and the regular education white female participant, twice answered extension questions initially asked to African-American students. In the French immersion classroom the emerging theme of a beneficial environment for African-American girls was underlined with nine extension questions directed toward African-American girls. There were also ten extension questions answered by white boys.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FIELD

Based on the themes that emerged during this study, French immersion was shown to be a more social environment where students help each other and an environment in which girls, particularly African-American girls are perceived in a positive light. The very social environment of French immersion allowed the students to be more autonomous relying more on each other and less on the teacher. Regular education, on the other hand, had less social interaction and more student-teacher interaction. In addition, the white students in this teacher-centered environment appeared to be more exclusive than the white French immersion students and white regular education students based their perceptions of other students on the teacher's interaction with them. Two themes, that of the invisibility and the negative perceptions of African-American students, were found in the regular education classroom, but not apparent in the French immersion

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classroom. In both contexts, African-American students showed more diversity of choice in their peer classifications and a desire for a more harmonious, peaceful classroom environment.

An obvious limitation of this study, one that severely limits the generalizability of the findings, is the limited number of students and the specificity of the context, Louisiana French immersion. Other limitations of this study that will need to be remedied in future studies include the need to ensure that classes are observed at different times of the day, that students are more closely matched to each other, and the need to track the students' achievement in both contexts. The addition of an interview with the parents would allow for insight into the parents' perceptions of their child's educational experience.

Based on the findings from this study it appears that teachers in both contexts should work toward creating a more peaceful classroom, as classroom discord appeared to have a differential effect on the African-American students. Nevertheless, French immersion classroom appeared to be a positive environment for African-American students, especially African-American girls, yet, during the data collection phase of this study, one Louisiana French immersion program in a majority African-American school was closed and there are rumors of closing the second of the three African-American French immersion programs. If this program is indeed beneficial to African-American students, as previous research and this study appear to demonstrate, than the closing of these schools may not be in the best interests of the students.

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Appendix A Students' Self-concept Scores

	French immersion self-concept scores	Regular education self-concept scores
1	Kristi 23	21
2	25	Valery 16
3	16	15
4	Jeremy 12	42
5	15	16
6	Trey 32	16
7	Maya 16	15
8	15	13
9	26	Helen 17
10	21	15
11	23	16
12	14	Kevin 21
	12	13
	17	18
	13	22
	19	Casey 17
	16	
Sum	315	293
Mean score	18.5	18.3
Standard deviation	5.6	6.8

Appendix B Students' Mean scores according to Ethnicity and Gender

African-American girls mean score	17.66 (outlier 25)	14
African American boys mean score	19 (12 & 26 outliers)	24.5 (outlier 42)
Anglo girls mean score	17.74 (outlier 23)	17
Anglo boys mean score	20 (outlier 32)	18

Note: The lower the score the higher the self-concept.

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